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UNDERSTANDING EXPERIENCES OF GRATITUDE IN ELEMENTARY TEACHERS:
IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

By

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IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

ABSTRACT

The science of gratitude is a fairly recent phenomenon, emerging out of positive psychology. The basic premise of the field is that cultivating a positive perspective and focusing on what one can be grateful for has positive outcomes in life. The benefits discovered include increases in subjective well-being and life satisfaction, better interpersonal relationships, and increases in pro-social behavior. In the school setting, research has found that developing gratitude can increase adolescents' level of satisfaction with school experience and academic attainment. The purpose of this phenomenological study is develop a deeper understanding of how elementary teachers experience gratitude. By learning more about how elementary teachers experience gratitude and construct meaning around those experiences, school leaders may be able to positively influence the culture of the school and build collaborative approaches to change through strengthening relationships. A constructivist-developmental framework served as the primary lens through which to study teachers' experiences of gratitude. Seven elementary teachers participated in a gratitude journaling exercise followed by individual interviews and a focus group. Three major themes emerged from the data: gratitude in contrast to negativity, perspective and choice, and making a difference/feeling valued. The results indicate that elementary teachers experience gratitude in their school settings through a sense of positivity, through being involved in student success, and in experiences of feeling valued for their work.

The data also indicated that teachers' perspectives on events or the amount of attention paid to daily occurrences with students and colleagues plays a role in the way that teachers experience gratitude. The participating teachers described a contrast between experiences of gratitude and attitudes of negativity. It is recommended that school leaders actively engage in promoting the value and meaning of teachers' work on a routine basis and seek methods to heighten teachers' awareness of gratitude in their school experiences. Data from the study and reviewed literature also support the use of gratitude interventions as a means to increase both awareness of gratitude and the effects of gratitude on individual's lives.

University of New England

Doctor of Education
Educational Leadership

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Statement of Problem.....	2
Purpose of the Study.....	3
Research Questions.....	3
Conceptual Framework.....	3
Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope.....	5
Significance.....	5
Definition of Terms.....	6
Conclusion.....	7
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	8
Positive Psychology.....	8
Gratitude Research.....	9
Gratitude Research in School Settings.....	11
School Climate and Leadership.....	14
Journaling.....	16
Conclusion.....	17
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY.....	18
Setting.....	18
Participants/Sample.....	19
Data.....	20
Analysis.....	21
Data Collection Timeline.....	22
Participant Rights.....	23
Potential Limitations of the Study.....	23
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS.....	25
Participants.....	25

Sarah.....	26
Kate.....	28
Maria.....	29
Alex.....	31
Rose.....	32
Pam.....	34
Dave.....	36
Analysis Methods.....	38
Theme #1: Gratitude in Contrast to Negativity.....	39
Theme #2: Perspective and Choice.....	41
Theme #3: Making a Difference/Feeling Valued.....	42
Summary.....	44
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION.....	45
Interpretation of Findings.....	46
Implications.....	48
Recommendations for Action.....	50
Recommendations for Further Study.....	51
Conclusion.....	52
REFERENCES.....	54
APPENDICES.....	57
Appendix A: Outreach to Stakeholders.....	57
Appendix B: Consent for Participation in Research.....	58
Appendix C: Interview Guide.....	62
Appendix D: Focus Group Guide.....	63

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Research Timeline.....	22
Table 2. Description of Participants.....	26

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Public schools are marked by change and a need to adapt to meet evolving expectations. School leaders play a pivotal role in positioning their organizations to meet these demands by tending to the culture of the school and facilitating change in their systems. Current research in educational leadership explores ways in which leaders redefine ideas of power and responsibility with the aim of transforming both individuals and schools. Fielding (2006) found that “an organization’s commitment to personal transformation is the sine non qua of a person-centered learning community” (as cited in van Oord, 2013, p. 432). In connection with these concepts, research is being conducted on the science of gratitude. Waters & Stokes (2015) stated, “Research in non-education settings has found that action gratitude is positively related to social wellbeing through its impact on motivating people to provide help, support and praise for others as well as show empathy, forgiveness and trust in relationships” (p. 5). Given the positive findings of recent gratitude research, educational leaders find themselves in a position to benefit from an increased understanding of how teachers experience gratitude in their school settings. As leaders strive for organizational improvement and positive school culture, understanding the role of gratitude could provide a new tool for understanding teachers’ perspectives.

While research has demonstrated the benefits of gratitude, the process of how to develop an awareness of gratitude in others is not clear. The challenge associated with understanding how teachers experience gratitude is one of perception. In order to understand how another person experiences something, one needs to consider the role of perception in constructing meaning and how this constructed meaning acts as the basis for how people behave. In the case

of schools, teachers have developed their own understanding of the school climate and culture. In considering the role of perception, Wheatley (2006) stated, “We cannot talk people into our version of reality because truly nothing is real for them if they haven’t created it” (p. 68). Furthermore, Wheatley (2006) argued that “we need to understand that all change results from a change in meaning. We change only if we decide that the change is meaningful to who we are” (p. 147). Here, one can see the significant role perception plays in people’s feelings about their organizations and about change. For a leader to be successful in helping to support and bring about change, it seems vitally necessary to be aware of how people build meaning around their experiences in school and how that meaning affects their perceptions and behaviors.

Statement of the Problem

Public schools can be stressful settings for both teachers and school leaders due to frequent initiatives and the complexities involved in finding commonalities among differing perspectives. Given this sort of environment, it is possible for teachers to begin to focus attention on negative interpretations of events and to find fault in the systems in which they are working. These negative perceptions can become a broader issue for school culture in that individual teachers often have the ability to influence their teams and other colleagues. In order to provide school leaders with a tool for influencing school culture and facilitating change, one must develop a more thorough understanding of how teachers perceive their experiences within the school.

Given the impacts of gratitude as outlined in the research above, specifically focusing on understanding how these elementary teachers experience and perceive gratitude in schools could yield significant information concerning positive school cultures.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study is develop a deeper understanding of how elementary teachers experience gratitude. By learning more about how elementary teachers experience gratitude and construct meaning around those experiences, school leaders may be able to positively influence the culture of the school and build collaborative approaches to change through strengthening relationships.

Research Questions

Guiding this research is the overarching question: How do elementary teachers experience gratitude in their schools settings? In order to gain a richer understanding of the lived experiences of gratitude for elementary teachers, the following related research questions were posed:

- How does the experience of gratitude impact teachers' perceptions of their school?
- How do teachers describe what supports and what hinders gratitude in schools?
- What practices enable school leaders to facilitate the experience of gratitude in schools?

Conceptual Framework

The science of gratitude is a fairly recent phenomenon, emerging out of positive psychology. The basic premise of the field is that cultivating a positive perspective and focusing on what one can be grateful for has positive outcomes in life. Morgan, Gulliford, & Carr (2015) extensively discussed the findings of recent studies on the impacts of experiencing gratitude. The benefits discovered include increases in subjective well-being and life satisfaction, better interpersonal relationships, and increases in pro-social behavior. In the school setting, research

has found that developing gratitude can increase adolescents' level of satisfaction with school experience and academic attainment.

A constructivist-developmental framework served as the primary lens through which to study teachers' experiences of gratitude. Constructivists believe that people actively create meaning and knowledge from their experiences rather than passively receive knowledge from external sources. In this way, learning involves continuous, active construction and reconstruction of experiences (Dewey, 1938). The basic principles of the theory include the assumption that meaning is constructed, that individuals make meaning from their experiences, and that development occurs through interactions with individuals' environments (Cooper & Stevens, 2006; Oja & Reiman, 2007). In considering meaning-making, Drago-Severson (2004) stated, "A person's way of knowing dictates how learning experiences will be taken in, managed, handled, used, and understood" (p. 24).

Transformational learning theory provides an additional and complimentary theoretical lens for researching how teachers experience gratitude in schools. In discussing possible theoretical frameworks, Anfara & Mertz (2015) stated, "Transformational learning theory posited that significant learning in our lives involves meaning making that can lead to a transformation of our personality or worldview" (p. 81). In keeping with this theory, one can see how the meaning that teachers' create from their experiences of gratitude could shape their outlook on their work in the school. The meaning that each teacher creates with respect to their experiences could directly impact how they feel about a school initiative or their school's culture in general.

If one accepts the premise that people create meaning through their perceptions and that the cultivation of positive perspectives, e.g. gratitude, can lead to positive experiences, it follows

that school leaders could benefit from learning about teachers' experiences of gratitude in their schools. Building on this initial premise, the above frameworks would help facilitate an understanding of teachers' experiences with gratitude, the subsequent meaning constructed around those experiences, and implications of these experiences for schools.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope

The premise of this study assumes that teachers have a familiarity with and experiences of gratitude in their school settings. In order to help remedy this assumption, prior discussion and defining of terms associated with gratitude and questions related thereto will be necessary to find a common understanding between researcher and participants. All participants will take part in a gratitude journaling intervention for one week prior to interviews in order to establish a baseline level of experience with gratitude.

Given the phenomenological nature of this study, the small sample size poses a limiting factor for generalized applicability of the findings to environments greater than the school in question. Coupled with this concern is the fact that the researcher acts in a supervisory capacity over the teachers being interviewed, though careful consideration has been given to the selection of participants to limit the effect of this relationship.

Significance

Researchers have studied gratitude in school settings mainly through the use of gratitude interventions with teachers and school leaders, which has yielded results demonstrating positive impacts of gratitude in schools. Teachers and school leaders have exhibited higher satisfaction with jobs, less stress, and improved relationship post-intervention (Chan, 2011, Flinchbaugh, Moore, Chang, & May, 2012). The significance of this study will manifest itself through an

increased understanding of teachers' experiences with gratitude, enabling school leaders to gain potential access to the concluded benefits of gratitude listed above.

If cultivating a deeper understanding of gratitude can help school leaders increase job satisfaction, lessen stress, and improve relationships for their teachers, it follows that school climate would improve and the functionality of the school in working collaboratively would increase. As a result, one can see how cultivating individual teacher's perceptions of gratitude and sharing perspectives with others could have a positive impact on the organization as a whole. Paying consideration to the school as a singular system that acts cohesively could promote collaboration. According to Wheatley (2006), "if we hold awareness of the whole as we study the part, and understand the part in relationship to the whole, profound new insights become available" (p. 143). Understanding gratitude could be the vehicle for this improvement.

Definition of Terms

Public School: a New York State school that is recognized by the New York State education Department (NYSED), is subject to all State and federal education law and regulation, and receives public funding.

School Leader: an individual who possesses appropriate School Building Leader or School District Leader certification from New York State Education Department and who is responsible for the supervision and management of a public school. School leaders are in charge of curriculum, budget, teacher evaluation, and student discipline among other duties. The term *school leader* is used interchangeably with the term *principal*.

Teacher: an individual who possess appropriate certification in elementary education, reading, or special education from the New York State Education Department and who is

responsible for instructing students within their certification area under the regulations of New York State and the policies of the school in which they teach.

Conclusion

The intent of this study is to learn about how teachers experience gratitude in schools by speaking directly to practicing educators. By hearing from teachers themselves regarding their understanding of gratitude and their perceptions concerning the impact of gratitude in their teaching practices and school life, school leaders should be able to gather insights into how experiences of gratitude may be enhanced in the school setting. A further explanation of the roots of the science of gratitude as well as past and current research on gratitude in schools and school leadership will be necessary to move the research forward. A theoretical grounding in transformational learning theory will help to frame the thinking behind the research and serve as a framework for understanding the descriptions of teachers' experiences with gratitude. Chapter Two will discuss research in the fields of positive psychology and the science of gratitude, including recent gratitude studies in school settings. Chapter Three will discuss the methodology used in the study and explain the methods associated with data collection and analysis. Chapter Four will review the data collected from the study concerning elementary teachers' experiences of gratitude in their school settings. Chapter Five will discuss the interpretation of the findings from the study as well as implications for school leaders and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature reporting on the role of gratitude in the lives of individuals and organizations has developed in recent years. In order to better understand how elementary teachers experience gratitude in their schools settings, a thorough review of recent literature provides a necessary background for inquiry. The review of literature considers the foundational role positive psychology plays for the science of gratitude. Research on the concept gratitude follows by examining studies occurring both inside and outside of school settings. Subsequently, in order to explore the relationship among gratitude and schools, the review considers literature concerning leadership and school climate. Finally, journaling research is reviewed to provide a base for understanding the role of writing in experiencing gratitude.

Positive Psychology

In order to begin to understand the recent findings of the science of gratitude, one should first seek to understand its antecedent, positive psychology. Many scholars trace its academic history back to positive psychology and the research conducted in that field. Positive psychology places an emphasis on what is right rather than what is wrong in both individuals and organizations. Hoy (2011) defined positive psychology as “the study of ordinary human strengths and what goes right in life. Its interest is in discovering what works, what is right, and what is improving, not what fails, what is wrong, and what is declining” (p. 428). Hoy (2011) made the case that positive psychology is linked to humanistic and phenomenological psychology in that there is an emphasis placed on how individuals make sense of their experiences. Positive psychology differs from the previous two schools of thought in that it utilizes the scientific method as opposed to being skeptical of science (p. 430) and it “embraces

the optimism of the humanists, the potential mechanisms of improvement of the cognitive psychologists, and the rigorous research methods of science” (p. 431). Applying the scientific method to the previous ways of thinking has helped researchers begin to study the field more closely.

In the past decade, research in the field of positive psychology has placed a focus on emphasizing the positive aspects of organizations rather than emphasizing the problems in an organization. Gold (2014) stated, “Research on change and culture programs would suggest that, despite positive intentions and aspirations, they are often framed in terms of problems” (p. 266). In reviewing literature for a study on gratitude and teacher burnout, Chan (2011) discussed how through positive psychology, researchers have found increased satisfaction with life and the adoption of a positive attitude as results (p. 810). Given the findings for individuals, one can see how organizational benefits to a positive psychological approach could also follow. Hoy (2011) discussed positive organizational research and made a case for this approach to be used more in the field of educational administration (p. 432). Hoy (2011) also found that “the research results are promising, and we believe that students of educational administration and organizations would be well advised to apply the frameworks from positive psychology to the studies of organizational structure, processes, and outcomes” (p. 434). The application of a positive psychological framework has led into the study of gratitude in organizational studies as well.

Gratitude Research

The study of the experiences of gratitude and the results of various gratitude interventions emerged from the previously discussed field of positive psychology. In considering recent studies connected to gratitude interventions, Wood, Froh, & Geraghty (2010) suggested that “gratitude is part of a wider life orientation towards noticing and appreciating the positive in the

world” (p. 891). Morgan, Gulliford, & Carr (2015) found the benefits of gratitude include increases in subjective well-being and life satisfaction, better interpersonal relationships, and increases in pro-social behavior. In the school setting, research has found that developing gratitude can increase adolescents’ level of satisfaction with school experience and academic attainment (p. 99). Morgan et al. (2015) stated, “Given the significant correlations between gratitude and positive psychological, social and emotional benefits that have been reported in recent years, it is not surprising that research has honed in on how feelings and experiences of gratitude can be increased” (p. 99). Franks (2015) discussed similar finding in terms of the benefits of expressing gratitude, including “increased happiness, self-worth and self-esteem, as well as an increased pride and trust in others” (p. 32). The positive outcomes of gratitude studies have yielded interventions designed to elicit the benefits of gratitude.

Much of the current gratitude research published in recent years has focused on a variety of gratitude interventions, which have enabled researchers to draw conclusions regarding how gratitude impacts individuals and organizations. Morgan et al. (2015) described three common gratitude interventions, including counting blessings, gratitude journals and diaries, and gratitude visits. The premise of the first two interventions is that by writing down what one is grateful for there is a shift of attention on what one has rather than what one does not have. The third exercise had individuals write and deliver a letter to someone to whom they were grateful (p. 99). Chan (2011) discussed a study that utilized the “count your blessings” approach to gratitude intervention. Through keeping a daily gratitude diary, participants were shown to feel better about their lives and expressed feeling more optimistic and connected to others (p. 811). Chan (2011) stated, “These studies suggested that gratitude has a causal influence on well-being, and

that an effective strategy to enhance well-being is to lead people to count their blessings or to reflect daily on those aspects of their lives for which they are grateful” (p. 811).

In addition to the impact of gratitude interventions on individuals, researchers have examined the effects of gratitude on relationships as well. Ting & Yeh (2014) discussed the role gratitude plays in building relationships and found that “gratitude may play a role in building trust and promoting social affiliation” (p. 87). In discussing gratitude as an antecedent to relationship quality, Ting & Yeh (2014) stated, “Gratitude emerges as a key force that influences a cooperative relationship. Gratitude represents the emotional core of reciprocity and a key motivating force in the development and maintenance of a cooperative relationship” (p. 97). Wood et al. (2010) summarized findings from recent gratitude studies and concluded that gratitude strengthened relationships and may impact conflict resolution and increase reciprocally helpful behavior. Given the discovered impacts of gratitude on relationship building, one can imagine how gratitude could play a positive role in schools.

Gratitude Research in School Settings

In recent years, several studies have considered various aspects of the effects of gratitude in school settings. The studies have focused on gratitude in students, teachers, and school leaders and generally involve the implementation of gratitude interventions. Chan (2011) found that “more grateful teachers were more likely to experience life satisfaction, and less likely to experience depersonalization or alienation from others” (p. 820). Given these findings, one can see the positive effects gratitude could have in schools. Furthermore, Chan (2011) argued for the development of more effective gratitude interventions and supported the necessity of further study in this area. Froh, Sefick, & Emmons (2007) also conducted research utilizing the

counting of blessings among adolescents, finding that the intervention provided a strong relationship between gratitude and satisfaction with school experience.

Ting & Yeh (2014) argued that relationship quality is key to successful organizations, and, as such, studied the impacts of gratitude and relationship quality on teacher loyalty. The study focused on answering whether teachers' gratitude influences the relationship quality between teachers and their school (p. 86). Through survey research methodology, the study gathered data from over 300 teachers on the topics of gratitude, commitment, trust, satisfaction, and loyalty. Ting and Yeh (2014) stated, "The results indicate that teachers' gratitude has a positive impact on trust, satisfaction, and commitment, which, in turn, directly or indirectly, positively influence behavioral/attitudinal loyalty" (p. 97). Other studies have found similar positive results by studying other school populations, such as students rather than teachers.

Flinchbaugh, Moore, Chang, & May (2012) studied the effects of stress management techniques and gratitude journaling on management students. In discussing the use of gratitude journaling in their study, Flinchbaugh et al. (2012) stated, "Several classroom studies of adolescents counting their blessings through journaling have shown a positive relationship between such gratitude and satisfaction with their school experiences over time" (p. 194). In this study, one group of students was asked to complete a gratitude journal for 12 weeks in which they kept track of five things for which they were thankful. Flinchbaugh et al. (2012) found that gratitude journaling contributed positively to the heightening of meaningfulness and engagement in the students' courses (p. 207).

Howells & Cumming (2012) explored the role of gratitude in the experiences of pre-service teachers. The authors gave consideration as to how gratitude should be considered in the context of teacher education and conducted a qualitative study utilizing gratitude practices with

pre-service teachers during their field experiences. In considering how to contextualize gratitude, Howells & Cumming (2012) stated, “By encapsulating the relationship between giver, receiver, and gift, gratitude is highly relevant to the educational context and may have the potential to restore it to being a true dynamic, where there is a healthy flow of giving and receiving from all parties” (p. 73) and proposed conceiving of gratitude as an “inner attitude,” which would then act as the lens through which teachers perceive and react to events. Outlooks that are seen to be in contrast to gratitude, and perhaps prohibitive to its development, are resentment, vengeance, and complaint. When reflecting on their own outlook, many educators relate most strongly to the negative kind of complaint that arises from resentment, blame, and a victim mentality (p. 76). In seeking to better understand the phenomenon of gratitude, Howells & Cumming (2012) concluded that “each one of the research participants in the present study experienced a range of positive effects when practicing gratitude. Gratitude was effective in both primary and secondary teaching contexts regardless of the teaching specialization” (p. 85).

In addition to studying the effects of gratitude in students and teachers in the school setting, the impact of gratitude on school leaders has also been considered. Waters & Stokes (2015) made a distinction between two types of gratitude: action gratitude and emotion gratitude and found that “emotion gratitude is likely to lead to wellbeing and broadened thinking within the individual, whereas action gratitude is likely to lead to relational wellbeing between individuals” (p. 5). Participants in the study kept a gratitude diary, which had them writing about three things for which they were thankful on a daily basis. Participants also wrote a gratitude letter to a significant person in their life to whom they were grateful. In discussing the results of the study, Waters & Stokes (2015) found that the gratitude diary contributed most effectively to stimulating positive emotions (p. 14). Waters & Stokes (2015) concluded, “The practical

implication of this research suggests that professional development programs for school leaders would benefit from including the study of gratitude to build emotional resources, cognitive resources, and relational resources” (p. 17). Given the practical implications of the research, school leaders could harness the positive effects of gratitude in shaping school climate in an effort to support school initiatives.

The studies discussed above share commonalities in their findings surrounding the impact of gratitude on individual wellbeing, increases in meaningfulness, and the facilitation of relationships. Given the positive outcomes of gratitude in school settings, questions remain surrounding the transformative nature of school leadership and the possible utilization of gratitude in the process. In considering possible relationships between the findings of gratitude research and current literature on school leadership, the concepts of teacher empowerment, collaboration, and evidence of individual transformation were reoccurring.

School Climate and Leadership

The concept of empowering teachers in taking ownership of school initiatives and times of change was frequently found in current leadership literature. In discussing their preferred model of leadership in schools, Lukacs & Galluzzo (2014) proposed a model “in which teachers who have specific areas of expertise become the primary agents of school change and are empowered to generate the improvements their schools need to better serve their students” (p. 101). Kotter (2012) argued, “Major internal transformation rarely happens unless many people assist. Yet employees generally won’t help, or can’t help, if they feel relatively powerless. Hence the relevance of empowerment” (p. 105). Reinforcing this point, Kotter (2012) stated, “Without sufficient empowerment, critical information about quality sits unused in workers’ minds and energy to implement changes lies dormant” (p. 175). Here one can see the

connections between empowering teachers and the facilitation of school change. Unless teachers feel that they have the ability to play a significant role in the change, they may remain unlikely to participate. Following through with the literature on gratitude, one may begin to draw inferences about the connectedness of gratitude with relationship-building, collaboration, and empowerment.

Recent literature on school change addresses the ideas of collaboration and relationship-building. Lukacs & Galluzzo (2014) stated, “Teacher change agents actively make an effort to reach out to colleagues and gain their commitment and energy to work on school improvement. Teachers who are agents of change have deep and creative responses to working collaboratively with peers” (p. 104). In support of these points, Reilly (2015) warned, “People are not inclined to follow along if they feel devalued. Wise leaders see themselves as learning partners” (p. 46). Relationships, then, allow school leaders to harness the power of collaboration and empower teachers to take part in change efforts and even lead initiatives. Linking collaboration and transformation, Workman & Cleveland-Inness (2012) stated, “Transformational leadership rests on collaboration and shared purpose, difficult to accomplish in more resistant environments” (p. 321). Given the above findings, leaders would benefit from methods that facilitate transformation through increasing positive relationships and collaboration in order to combat resistance.

In discussing the effects of leadership on transformation, van Oord (2013) stated, “The leadership of an educational organization—the way leadership is perceived and shaped—will to a large extent determine the success of the transformation it instigates among its students and members of staff” (p. 420). One of the key concepts from the above quote lies in the idea that leadership can bring about transformation in the individuals who make up the organization.

Foster argued that the transformative leader “both inspires and transforms individual followers so that they too develop a new level of concern about their human condition, and, sometimes, the condition of humanity at large” (as cited in van Oord, 2013, p. 422). The question remains as to how leaders bring about this transformation and empower teachers to participate and lead change initiatives in schools.

Journaling

Connecting gratitude with personal and professional transformation, research surrounding journaling has provided pertinent findings. In a study of how higher education professionals used journals to help make sense of their lives, Cooper & Stevens (2006) found that “their journal keeping practices foster not only a deeper way of knowing but also a way to take control of their experiences and continue to learn and develop as adults” (p. 12). In an experimental comparison concerning gratitude, participants who kept gratitude journals on a weekly basis exercised more regularly, reported fewer physical symptoms, felt better about their lives as a whole, and were more optimistic about the upcoming week compared to those who recorded hassles or neutral life events (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Further evidence for the positive impacts of journaling can be found in research regarding positive psychology and the gratitude intervention known as three good things. *Three good things* is a journaling-based gratitude intervention that asks participants to write down three things that went well along with the causes of those occurrences on a daily basis. Seligman, Steen, Park, & Paterson (2005) found that participants who completed the three good things exercise daily for one week displayed increased happiness and decreased depressive symptoms for six months.

Conclusion

The science of gratitude is a fairly recent phenomenon, emerging out of positive psychology. As discussed above, research has shown that cultivating a positive perspective and focusing on what one can be grateful for has positive outcomes in life. The benefits discovered include increases in subjective well-being and life satisfaction, better interpersonal relationships, and increases in pro-social behavior. In the school setting, research has found that developing gratitude can increase adolescents' level of satisfaction with school experience and academic attainment. School leaders should be interested in how teachers can affect their experiences through their perceptions and how gratitude could be a powerful force in facilitating a change toward the positive.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In order to better understand how elementary school teachers experience gratitude in schools, a qualitative phenomenological study was conducted. According to Merriam (2009), a phenomenological approach allows the researcher “to uncover the essence of an individual’s experience” (p. 93). Given that the purpose of this study focuses on understanding the ways teachers experience gratitude, a phenomenological methodology is fitting. Two major schools of phenomenology exist, transcendental and hermeneutic, each with differing assumptions about experience and methods for organizing and analyzing data (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). For the purposes of this study, the researcher utilized transcendental phenomenological methods. In considering this methodology, Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell (2004) stated, “Meaning is the core of transcendental phenomenology, a design for acquiring and collecting data that explicates the essences of human experience” (p. 19).

Through in-depth interviews with experienced elementary teachers and transcendental phenomenological analysis, this study sought to answer the following questions:

- How do elementary teachers experience gratitude in their school settings?
- How does the experience of gratitude impact teachers’ perceptions of their school?
- How do teachers describe what supports and what hinders gratitude in schools?
- What practices enable school leaders to facilitate the experience of gratitude in schools?

Setting

The study site was a rural public elementary school in Northern New York, which serves approximately 500 students in prekindergarten through fourth grade. The school is composed of 35 teachers, approximately 20 support staff, and one administrator. The elementary school is

part of a central school district which includes a middle and high school and a total of approximately 1300 students. The Superintendent of Schools provided permission for the elementary school to be used as the study site. Participating teachers took part in in-depth interviews connected to the research questions above. Participation in the study had a minimal impact on the work of the teachers and was conducted during off-school hours.

Participants/Sample

In order to be considered for selection in the study, the elementary teachers needed to have a minimum of ten years of experience teaching in the school, which allowed for a depth of experience from which to draw during interviews. Supporting this type of selection criteria, Creswell (2015) suggested that a purposeful sample is the best possible selection method in qualitative research (p. 178). Teachers were invited to participate in the study and had the option to decline participation. Final participants were selected utilizing maximum variation based upon grade level and/or content area of the teachers, as well as age and gender, in order to increase the range of experiences represented by the sample (Creswell, 2013).

For the purposes of this study, a sample size of 7 teachers allowed for a breadth of experience while permitting time for the in-depth interviews required to explore and find meaning in the experiences of the participants. In discussing the roles of interviews in qualitative research, Merriam (2009) argued that “in this type of research the crucial factor is not the number of respondents but the potential of each person to contribute to the development of insight and understanding of the phenomenon” (p. 105). Creswell (2013) strengthened this argument as he claimed, “For a phenomenological study, the process of collecting information involves primarily in-depth interviews. The important point is to describe the meaning of the phenomenon for a small number of individuals” (p. 161). To conclude the interview process,

participants took part in a focus group session to collect a shared understanding of their experiences with gratitude (Creswell, 2015).

Data

In order to assure that all members of the study had a base level of experience with gratitude, participants and the principal investigator completed a gratitude intervention prior to scheduled interviews with the researcher. Participants completed the gratitude intervention known as the three good things exercise, which required daily journaling about three positive events on a daily basis along with an explanation of their causes. Participants were given the following instructions:

1. Give the event a title (e.g., “co-worker complimented my work on a project”)
2. Write down exactly what happened in as much detail as possible, including what you did or said and, if others were involved, what they did or said.
3. Include how this event made you feel at the time and how this event made you feel later.
4. Explain what you think caused this event—why it came to pass.

Following the gratitude journaling, the researcher conducted interviews to gather data about each participant’s experiences of gratitude. All interviews were conducted within two weeks of the completion on the gratitude intervention. The interviews were semi-structured in order to allow individual participants the ability to share information that was unique to their own experience. Pietkiewicz & Smith (2012) stated that “semi-structured interviews allow the researcher and the participant to engage in a dialogue in real time” (p. 365). In keeping with Moustakas (2004), the semi-structured interviews will utilize two primary questions focusing on what has been experienced in terms of gratitude and what contexts or situations have influenced the experiences of gratitude (as cited in Creswell, 2013, p. 81). Other questions and follow-up

prompts were used to promote the sharing of teachers' interpretations of the experiences they share. Because of the semi-structured nature of the interviews, the researcher was able to adjust the order of questions to suit the evolution of the dialogue taking place. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Analysis

Phenomenological data are commonly analyzed according to established processes based on the work of Moustakas (1994) and Creswell (2013). Creswell (2013) stated, "In phenomenology, there have been specific, structured methods of analysis advanced, especially by Moustakas (1994)" (p. 193). The first step in the analysis is known as horizontalization in which statements are identified from the transcribed interviews that provide information about the experiences of the participants. From this point, statements deemed significant in terms of teachers' experiences with gratitude are clustered into themes or meaning units (Moustakas, 1994). In describing the next analytical stage, Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell (2004) stated, "From the thematic analysis, the researcher then provides a description of 'what' was experienced in textural descriptions, and 'how' it was experienced in structural descriptions" (p. 30). The final stage of analysis is the writing of a composite description that seeks to capture the essence of the participants' experiences. Considering this final stage, Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell (2004) stated, "This description becomes the essential, invariant structure of the ultimate 'essence' which captures the meaning ascribed to the experience" (p. 31).

In order to validate the findings of the analysis, member checking was utilized. Creswell (2015) stated, "Member checking is a process in which the researcher asks one or more participants in the study to check the accuracy of the account" (p. 259). Member checks were incorporated into the analysis at multiple points to allow participating teachers to review the

transcripts of their interviews as well as review the themes produced by the researcher. Having participants review the analysis as it occurs increased both the accuracy and validity of the findings.

Data Collection Timeline

Data collection took place after receiving both committee and Instructional Review Board approval as indicated in Table 1. Once both approvals were received, participants were solicited and confirmed. Participants were then completed the required gratitude journaling exercise prior to scheduling individual interviews with the researcher. A focus group acted as the culminating step for the collection of data. The research process followed the timeline below:

Table 1

Research Timeline

Timeframe	Research Phase
April 2017	Institutional Review Board proposal submission, site permission from the school district obtained and research proposal presentation.
Late April-early May 2017	Participant outreach for both focus groups and interviews; question revision with input from UNE cohort and instructor.
May-early June 2017	Participants completed gratitude journaling and interviews conducted.
June 2017	Continue data collection; data transcribed; coded and analyzed; began writing up findings
July-early September 2017	Final revisions of dissertation.
September 2017	Presented dissertation.

Participant Rights

Participation in the study was voluntary and participating teachers had the choice to opt-out of the study at any time. Participating teachers completed a consent form and were provided with an assurance of confidentiality. All data was collected and cataloged without personal identifiers, enabling the identity of participants to remain anonymous. In addition to the availability of member checking throughout the data analysis, participating teachers received completed copies of the study.

Potential Limitations of the Study

The phenomenological methodology employed presented potential limitation in terms of the sample size in this study. Because of the sample size of 7 teachers, coupled with the nature of exploring personal experiences of gratitude in schools, the findings of the study are not be able to be directly generalized to larger contexts. Also connected to the study's methodology was the need to separate the researcher's own experiences and conceptualizations of gratitude in schools. Merriam (2009) found that "it is common practice in phenomenological research for researchers to write about their own experiences of the phenomenon or to be interviewed by a colleague in order to 'bracket' their experiences prior to interviewing others" (p. 93). By utilizing the method of bracketing, the biases and preconceived ideas of the researcher were made transparent.

The relationship of the researcher and the participants required forethought and ethical care given that the researcher also acts as the principal of the site school. In situations of researchers acting in a supervisory role, Creswell (2013) recommended that "when it becomes important to study one's own organization or workplace, I typically recommend that multiple strategies of validation be used to ensure that the account is accurate and insightful" (p. 151). In

line with this thinking, multiple member check opportunities were employed for the sake of validation. Participants were able to check data after the interviews, after the transcription of the interviews, and after all written analysis was completed. The voluntary nature of the study also supported the ethical care of participants as did the continued ability to opt-out. The subject matter of the study posed minimal risk to participating teachers as they shared their own experiences of gratitude through interviews and dialogue that did not force participants to answer questions with which they felt uncomfortable.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This qualitative phenomenological study concentrated on elementary teachers' experiences of gratitude within their school settings. Data were collected through individual interviews with elementary teachers from the site school and a culminating focus group with all study participants. Data from each participant's interview and contributions to the focus group will be presented to develop an understanding of the experiences of gratitude for each teacher. Common themes that emerged from the data will then be presented in addition to how the data was analyzed and coded. Each theme will be presented with supporting remarks from the participants' interviews and contributions in the focus group.

In order to assure participants had experience with the phenomenon of gratitude, each teacher completed a gratitude journaling exercise for one week as outlined in chapter three. The journaling experience acted as a springboard for individual, semi-structured interviews with each participant. The interviews sought to uncover the lived experiences of gratitude for elementary teachers in their school settings through a series of open-ended questions. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed the researcher to follow the natural course of participants' responses and improvise and extend questions as appropriate. All interviews and the focus group were transcribed using a third-party transcriptionist. Transcriptions were completed within 24 hours of submission and were shared with participants for their review.

Participants

Table 2 provides a descriptive profile of the participants. Seven teachers participated in the study, each with at least ten years of teaching experience. These teachers all work in the same elementary school, which served as the site for the study. The participating teachers

represent a cross-section of the school in terms of the subject/grade level taught, years of teaching, and gender. For the purpose of the study, the participants are identified as Sarah, Kate, Maria, Alex, Rose, Pam, and David.

Table 2

Description of Participants

Participant	Grade Level/ Content Area	Years Teaching	Gender
Sarah	First Grade	26	Female
Kate	Fourth Grade	18	Female
Maria	Kindergarten	17	Female
Alex	3rd Grade	11	Male
Rose	2nd Grade	13	Female
Pam	Special Education	30	Female
David	Reading	16	Male

Sarah

Sarah, a first grade teacher, was among the first to reply to the invitation to participate in the study. From the very beginning of the interview, Sarah demonstrated that she had wrestled with how she thought about gratitude during the journaling experience:

At first when I first started, I thought it was going to be easy. Then I got myself in this little game of well what is feeling gratitude. Is it feeling thankful? Is it, can it just be, does it have to be a concrete reward or can it be just saying to yourself okay, I'm grateful that whatever. I did a bunch of different kinds. It was useful in some respects because there were a couple of days I thought to myself not one single thing went right. Then when I thought about it, some things did go right.

The concept of gratitude as a feeling of thankfulness continued throughout the interview. When asked how to explain gratitude, Sarah focused on thankfulness and, in particular, highlighted being thankful for feeling a sense of belonging in school:

Through this whole thing I think the thing that brings me gratitude, and it's going to sound so corny, is feeling a sense of belonging. When I retire I'm not going to necessarily have that. There's something about walking into the cafeteria, that might not be the best example, but walking down the hall and saying hi to your peers and saying hello to kids you had and have kids that you don't even know say hello to you, it's a special feeling. I think of everything, of all the little things I'm grateful for, I think that sense of belonging is probably the most important.

In addition to a sense of belonging as central to her experiences of gratitude in school, Sarah discussed the role her interactions with her students plays for her, highlighting student success as a catalyst for gratefulness:

I'm always grateful for when you can literally see a light bulb go on. When you see that light bulb go on just like I listened to somebody read today and he could read, not the greatest but he could read a little bit. He was so proud of himself. That's the kind of the thing I'm grateful for.

Throughout the interview, Sarah used terms related with positivity in exchange for and to explain gratitude. Terms such as negative or negativity were used as a way of explaining the opposite of gratitude. At one point, Sarah stated, "I think the more negative you are, the less gratitude you have in your life, at school." This comment was shortly followed by, "I think the more you recognize the things you're grateful for, the more fun you're going to have, the more you're going to look forward to coming to work." For Sarah, there was a connection between gratitude and positivity. In closing the interview, Sarah brought these concepts together, stating, "I think we're lucky because in our job, as hard as it can be sometimes, there are always little tiny things that can make you grateful as long as you stop and think about."

Kate

Kate is a fourth grade teacher. Throughout the interview and the focus group, Kate approached gratitude from a personal perspective that indicated reflection on her part. Kate quickly contrasted gratitude with negativity when asked to describe gratitude:

I think it's seeing the glass half-full. Because I think you can start your day and you can find 8,000 things that are stacked against you, that are out of your control, and wallow in that. Or you can say, "These are all the things that I'm really lucky to have." I think I tend to be a lucky-to-have person. That's how I think about it, kind of focusing on the positive end of things, versus the negative.

Kate outlined gratitude as a mindset and a way of approaching challenges in her life. Kate further explained her thoughts on gratitude and negativity by framing gratitude as a choice:

I would explain it, and it's for more ... I think you have two paths in your life. For me it's very relevant. I think you can choose which way to live your life. I think you can spend your days thinking about the thousand ways that you were short-changed. People did you wrong, and I think they're probably true. That's the other thing. I think people that are negative at school, I think what they're complaining about is not necessarily untrue. I think they're legitimate concerns, but I think you can decide this is how my life is going to be focused. Or you can decide, hey, this is ... I have a great job. I get to work with kids all day. These are all the good things that I have, and these might stink, but I'm going to make the best of what I have. That doesn't mean you don't have a complaint about school.

Kate also recognized her role in student success as part of her experiences of gratitude.

Kate discussed how receiving feedback from parents about students demonstrating success when perhaps they had not in the past generated gratitude:

Like when we go to a CSE meeting and a parent says, "This is the first time my kid has thought they could be a reader." Or they thought, the first time they've loved school. That is very motivating to me. A kid who, like one of the things I put in the gratitude journal ... I have a kid all year that didn't read, didn't read, didn't read. All of a sudden this quarter it's all come together. She found books she likes. Then all of a sudden she is now a reader. She sees herself that way. She takes a lot of pride and I make a big deal of her borrowing books that I own, that she can take them home and bring them back. I think those things are very motivating for me in general.

Students feeling successful and building positive relationships were central for Kate, but ultimately her thoughts on gratitude centered on mindset and choice. When asked to summarize gratitude, Kate stated, "I think you choose your path. That's my thought of gratitude."

Maria

Maria is a kindergarten teacher. Throughout the interview, Maria made it clear that the gratitude journaling exercise was impactful for her and that the concept of paying attention to gratitude had started to shift her perspective on her teaching and her work relationships:

On the first day I put, "I need to focus more on change the way you look at things," so I did really try to do that. Then I got to Wednesday and I had this thing happen that I wasn't grateful for, but it really took a huge part of my day, so I was like, "You're going to find a way to be grateful for it." By the end, I was more in the mindset of being able to do it. At the beginning, it was a little more challenging. I felt like my things were superficial, but as I went through it, I got better at it.

Maria used the term "mindset" frequently as she discussed her experiences of gratitude

and focused attention on perspective throughout the interview. Maria described what she meant by “mindset”:

I would say it is about the way you look at the situation because, I mean, truthfully, the day is pretty negative. The days, they get cyclically negative depending on what's going on or how pressured I feel. Some days it's like, "This is some heavy stuff we're dealing with." It's like for me the mindset of gratitude is like take a step back from this little situation I'm in and try to keep my eyes on the big picture. I guess, for me, it's about don't get bogged down in the little things because the stuff that can bring you down is so little.

In a similar fashion to other participants, Maria's experiences of gratitude in part revolved around her feelings about her students and her ability to make an impact on their learning:

As a teacher, in general, I do try to be grateful for my job, you know? Just for the opportunity to actually have an impact. You get caught up in, "Oh, my gosh. Am I really even doing a good job in the day-to-day," but, again, taking a step back and looking at the big picture, I have lots of opportunities to do good for kids.

Maria continued discussing her interaction with students as a source of gratitude and began to define a distinction between positive and negative outlooks in terms of experiencing gratitude:

[Teaching] is pretty rewarding. Not a lot of people get that at their job. For a lot of people their job is constant negativity, and I have an opportunity where I could overlook the negative all the time if I tried. There's way more positive, but we do get caught up in it. I have gratitude as a teacher for this place and the people, and also for the kids who give me a chance to see good in things.

In further outlining negativity's role in her experiences, Maria talked about how some colleagues tend to view situations in a predominantly negative manner and how this can skew others' perspectives:

I think there are definitely things that happen that push me away from gratitude because if you listen, if you are accepting to grippers, they're always there. There are always people who aren't grateful, who don't have gratitude. I feel like the more I am thinking about this day-to-day, maybe not in the situation I'm in, but then when I reflect back on my experiences with certain people I'm like, "Oh, I'm not going to be like that." It's made me more aware of people who aren't grateful.

When asked to provide a final thought on how she would describe gratitude to someone who did not know anything about it, Maria replied:

It's about, maybe, depending on where you are in your personal journey, it's about changing the way you look at things. For most people, I think, that's an easy way to put it. I think it's also about not overlooking the small things.

Alex

Alex is a third grade teacher and one of two male teachers who participated in the study. Alex focused heavily on his teaching role and his success instructionally as he considered his experiences of gratitude. Alex described his experience with writing the gratitude journal as one that improved with each passing day of the activity:

At first, I felt it was really difficult. It was hard to find gratitude. So I started looking at my own classroom, some students in particular. It seems like when I was doing my journal entries, it seemed to be the same students that I was focused on. So that was kind of interesting. Not every time, but quite a few of the instances in the journal, it was one or

two students from the classroom that I helped through the day and they showed gratitude in return. That was really interesting to see. I found finding gratitude ... I found gratitude more than I thought I would, I guess. I don't really pay attention to it as much. I think I found gratitude from the students even more than I thought.

Alex later remarked how reflecting on lessons and successful encounters with helping students were sources of gratitude for him in his teaching:

When I think of it, I think of the finished product, like for example, with third grade play. I know where they start, and where it ends at the end of the third grade play. I think, "Wow, they've come a long ways. You really worked hard to do this, and this is the result." The same thing in the classroom too from the beginning of the year to the end, you can really see growth, especially within reading, or math, or anything. I really feel grateful that I can do that for children, and help them to grow.

Alex summarized his thoughts on his experiences of gratitude with one word, "thankfulness." Alex expanded, saying, "I think thankfulness sums it up. Just I'm thankful to be doing what I'm ... Just be thankful for doing what you're doing, and thankful for showing thanks to someone else. Just making their day more positive.

Rose

Rose is a second grade teacher. Rose expressed having a difficult time with the gratitude journaling exercise in the beginning, but demonstrated a rapid change in perspective:

It was hard, at first, to be honest. Like, I couldn't find anything [to feel grateful about] at first. So it was hard at first, then I started really just, "Okay, I got to find something," you know? So the first couple days, I got like two things, then as I started, it got easier, and easier, and easier to find things, and then of course, when you start looking for things,

and you find them, then you're like, "Oh." I don't know, it just made you happier, I guess. I guess that's the way to say it. You know what I mean? You started to focus on more of the positive than dealing with the negative.

In considering what situations influence her experiences of gratitude, Rose focused on her interactions with her students:

I think it's just the kids. For me, it's the kids, you know. Because in reality, too, the kids can change my whole day. To just take a minute, take a deep breath, and be like, "Okay, oh yeah, look at that. Look at how far they've come." You know? That's the thing, and I step back, and be like, "Oh, yeah," you know. Yeah, okay, he maybe still can't do this, but look at where he started now, look where he is.

Rose framed her experiences of gratitude with the contrast between positive and negative frequently throughout the interview. In general, Rose used the terms "positive" or "positivity" interchangeably with gratitude and used "negative" or "negativity" as an antonym for gratitude:

Gratitude is being thankful, but I think it's ...with doing this, it became more of just the positive things that are happening every day, that's more than being like thankful, like, "Oh, thank god they passed the test." Do you know what I mean? It's just looking for the positives in the day, instead of letting, really, those few negatives take over the whole day, because really, when you sat back and looked, there were more positives that happened during the day than the negatives, but it's so easy to let the negative take over.

Rose expressed that focusing on her experiences of gratitude during her time in school, it was easier to deal with the negative events of the day and that her perspective changed toward embracing the positive. Rose discussed how negativity among colleagues can be contagious, but that gratitude offers her a different perspective:

It's easier to be negative, so when other people around you are ... I, personally, am easily sucked in. I can be made to jump on the bandwagon, you know? If the teachers around me are ... If we're all headed in the same direction, you know? I think there's a lot of that. I think there's a lot of people who are having trouble looking at the big picture, and picking out that really our day is mostly positive.

When asked to expand on that idea, Rose framed gratitude as a choice:

You just have to decide. You have to make that choice. You either make the choice that it's going to be a good day, and we're going to get through stuff, and we're going to do what we can do, and we're going to have fun, and we're going to smile, and we're going to appreciate every little accomplishment we do, or we're going to come in, and we're going to be ugly, and grumpy, and we're going to be mean to each other, and mean to the kids, and just mean to ourselves.

When asked to summarize her experiences of gratitude, Rose shared that it is “just being thankful for all of the positive things that happen during the day, and noticing the positive things that happen during the day, and know how to change a negative to a positive, without exacerbating it.”

Pam

Pam is the second most veteran teacher in the study and has taught special education students at the site school for 30 years. Pam focused much of her attention on her students' success and her work as a special education teacher while reflecting on her experiences of gratitude. Knowing that her students are understanding the material brings gratitude for Pam:

So often with the kids I work with, things are so hard for them or it seems like they're not getting things. When there is a moment when they remember something that they hadn't,

or they show you that they got it, then for me, that's like a big moment. They can be really inconsistent, so even when they still are inconsistent, when it does finally come through I feel like, "All right, all that work was, it was valuable or it was worth something."

Pam equated gratitude with a sense of value or the sense that something was worthwhile. When asked to define gratitude, Pam said, "I guess for me it would be just, it's a feeling that this is worthwhile, something is worthwhile, just makes it worth doing what you do, I guess. That's for me what it is." Pam continued her theme of worthwhileness and value in terms of her encounters with gratitude at school:

When colleagues, I suppose if when colleagues seek out my opinion or advice on something, that makes me feel like, I mean I feel a sense of gratitude that my professional opinion is valued, so I would have a sense of gratitude that people think I'm doing a good job.

Pam also brought in a social aspect of gratitude in terms of working collaboratively with her colleagues. Pam recounted that when those experiences go well, it can be a source of gratitude:

When I work with classroom teachers and we do work together and those things go well, then I get a sense of gratitude because I like working with other people. I don't always want to work on my own, so I think those contribute to a sense of gratitude when we find those places and times where we can work together. I think that contributes to it [gratitude].

As a veteran teacher, Pam spoke about her experiences with various leadership techniques and styles as they related to her own experiences of gratitude. Pam talked about

simple gestures that may help teachers connect with their own sense of gratitude about their work:

I think that sometimes even every once in a while, letting someone know in a specific way something that they do that's valuable to the school, I don't think people hear that a lot really. You know what I mean? That can help somebody for like a whole year, when they just get a very specific like, "Wow, they saw that in me." I'm just saying I think sometimes we don't, we think we're telling people good job but do we really notice things that people do?

In an effort to summarize her thinking about gratitude, Pam framed her thoughts in terms of keeping school and teaching in perspective:

For me, I think it's about reflecting on every day and thinking about despite all the things that make you want to sigh and maybe bang your head and go, "Oh," I think there's a lot of good things too and to remind yourself of those so that, because I want to walk back in the door every day.

Dave

Dave is a reading teacher who works with students in kindergarten through 4th grade in the site school. Dave is one of two male participants in the study. In speaking with Dave about his experiences with gratitude in the school, he initially focused on his realization that he frequently has experiences that cause gratitude, but that at times it is easy not to pay attention to them:

I thought it was interesting because I didn't realize the little things that happen over the course of a day that some of the kids do sometimes that, I don't know, make a little

difference that sometimes you don't always pay attention to. It's neat that I concentrated more on it to say, "Hey, this is what happened today. This was kind of neat."

Throughout the interview, Dave's experiences of gratitude focused on his interaction with his students. Dave cited feeling more comfortable with exchanges of gratitude with students over his peers:

I'm more comfortable with the kids than I am with the adults. If an adult does something for me that I would have a harder time expressing my gratitude towards them for doing that. And I know sometimes if they say ... maybe if they say something to another teacher about like, "Wow, Dave's really done good work with this." I try to be humble. I get kind of embarrassed by it, so it's hard for me, I think to do it with the adults than it is with the kids.

When asked about the impact gratitude plays in his school life, Dave again focused on the concept of paying attention to experiences to see the positive. The idea of positivity was used in exchange for gratitude:

Paying attention to this made me pay more attention to how some of the kids or some of the adults felt toward me, which ... I don't necessarily talk about myself, so it made me feel good doing something like this because I don't always pay attention to how much the kids appreciate or how much maybe some of the faculty appreciate.

Dave continued to express that increasing other teachers' awareness of gratitude in their work could shift peoples' mindsets to a more positive one and potentially impact the school as a whole. Dave discussed the impact of focusing on gratitude:

You pay attention to the good things more than the bad things. So I think this could be a definitely a positive experience for everybody. Maybe everyone would try to focus a

little bit more on the positive. And if everyone did that, maybe it could create positivity among everyone else. If you come in good spirits thinking, "Hey, I've got this to look forward to today," or something, then maybe other people like, "Hey, you know what? That's great. What do I have to look forward to today?"

When asked to summarize his thoughts about gratitude, Dave said that when one experiences gratitude “you're paying attention more to the good things that happen over the course of the day. I think there are more good things that happen than people realize.”

Analysis Methods

Given the phenomenological methodology of this study, the analysis of data was concerned with examining the lived experiences of the participants. The data were analyzed through the method of coding and finding of emergent themes. The researcher followed the data analysis model by Creswell (2013):

- Reading through the written transcripts several times to obtain an overall feeling for them
- Identifying significant phrases or sentences that pertained directly to the experience
- Formulating meanings and clustering them into themes common to all of the participants' transcripts
- Integrating the results into an in-depth, exhaustive description of the phenomenon
- Validating the findings with the participants, and including participants' remarks in the final description (p. 89).

Through seven individual interviews and one collective focus group, data were collected and transcribed, providing a written record of all discourse. Once the documents were transcribed, participants were able to review the language and validate the data. Upon completion of the validation, the transcripts were read multiple times by the researcher with an eye toward finding significant statements about the experience of gratitude in schools. The data was highlighted in a color-coded fashion as significant statements were found and categories of statements began to emerge in the form of coding the data. At this point in the analysis, themes regarding the participating teachers' experiences of gratitude emerged. The color coding of data, in the form of quotations from participants, was refined and the data was placed into categories separate from the original transcriptions, providing columns of supporting quotes for each emergent theme.

Three major themes emerged from the data: gratitude in contrast to negativity, perspective and choice, and making a difference/feeling valued. As the researcher repeatedly pored through the data, the themes became clear despite subtle differences in the seven participants' interpretations of gratitude in their school lives. The emergent themes listed above showed themselves in some fashion in all of the interviews and the focus group. Though exact wording for the description of their experiences varied some from participant to participant, the underlying sentiment was joined together in the themes.

Theme #1: Gratitude in Contrast to Negativity

At some point during their interview or focus group, all of the participants framed part of their discussion by contrasting negativity with gratitude. Several of the participants used the terms positive or positivity in defining gratitude and used negativity as a way of defining the opposite of a grateful perspective. Sarah summarized this concept in her interview, stating, "I

think the more negative you are, the less gratitude you have in your life and at school.” Rose reinforced this idea, stating, “It's just looking for the positives in the day, instead of letting those few negatives take over the whole day, because really there were more positives that happened during the day than the negatives, but it's so easy to let the negative take over.”

Within this theme, participants discussed how gratitude and a positive outlook increase teachers' willingness to work and promote a better school climate. Sarah stated, “I think the more you recognize the things you're grateful for, the more fun you're going to have, the more you're going to look forward to coming to work.” In terms of combatting negativity, Kate shared, “I think some people will always be negative, but I think if the culture was a positive culture, I think people would pull back a little bit because that's not the climate of who you're with.” Connecting these thoughts together with the data is that all participants defined gratitude as positive in contrast to negative. Gratitude therefore, was thought of as a means to a more positive school climate and work environment by the group.

Participants also focused on negativity as a means of defining gratitude by its opposite. All participants agreed that there were teachers within the school that tended to be more negative than others. This concept was explored by many of the participants. Dave stated, “There's just some people who seem a little down a lot of the time, or a little pessimistic maybe, and maybe something like this [gratitude] could change their attitude a little bit.” “Maria shared, “I think there are definitely things that happen that push me away from gratitude because if you listen, if you be accepting to grippers, they're always there. There are always people who aren't grateful, who don't have gratitude.”

One minor nuance in terms of the group's uniformity with regard to gratitude and negativity was that some of the participants shared that there is occasionally a temptation to take

on the negative attitude. Alex shared, “I would say negativity is easier.” Rose indicated a similar feeling, stating, “It's easier to be negative, so when other people around you are ... I, personally, am easily sucked in. I can be made to jump on the bandwagon, you know? If we're all headed in the same direction.” These comments showed that even for those who were able to articulate the positive influence of gratitude in their teaching experiences, the pull toward negativity was real. Despite this potential attraction to the negative, these participants explained that their experiences of gratitude helped them stay positive.

Theme #2: Perspective and Choice

Emerging from the comments of all participants, the second theme involved the concept of teachers' perspectives of their own experiences as well as the concept that there is a level of choice that teachers make in terms of being positive or negative. Several of the participants commented that their experiences of gratitude required simply paying attention to those aspects of the school day that provided opportunities to feel grateful. Dave commented that “some of it is just something that happens all the time that I don't pay attention to.” The idea that without the proper attention and reflection everyday opportunities for gratitude could go unnoticed was a common sentiment of the participants. In providing a concise definition of gratitude, Rose shared, “It's the focus on the positive instead of the negative during the day.” Concentrating on how they focus or pay attention was mentioned repeatedly in interviews and the focus group.

Perspective was further discussed by participants in considering how to weigh the significance of school events. Rose commented, “I think there are a lot of people who are having trouble looking at the big picture, and picking out that really our day is mostly positive.” Along the same line, Kate provided the analogy of gratitude as a sifter:

It [gratitude] is a good sifter, I think. If you're in the habit of taking something that's not great that happens to you, and say, "Well. It could be this, or it could be this." I think you sift a lot of those negatives out, and then when you get to the few that you can't do, there's no, like it could be worse, that's the one that you need to say, "Hey. This is really an issue for me."

The idea of being able to reflect on experiences and put them into a perspective that enabled teachers to remain focused on their teaching and positive about their work was a significant component of the participants' thoughts on gratitude. The sifter analogy gave recognition to the fact that there could be genuinely negative occurrences in the school, but that a lens of gratitude helped teachers recognize where to invest energy.

The final nuance of this theme came from three of the participating teachers who very specifically felt that individuals had a conscious choice to make in terms of their perspective on their school experiences with gratitude, that the individual could control their ability to feel grateful or not depending on his or her own choice. Maria simply stated, "There's a choice on how you look at it." Rose shared, "You have to make that choice. You either make the choice that it's going to be a good day, and we're going to get through stuff, or we're going to come in and we're going to be ugly, and grumpy." Kate strongly commented that "I think you have control. At the end of the day when you go to bed at night, you make choices about how it is. That's my thought of gratitude. I think you choose your path."

Theme #3: Making a Difference/Feeling Valued

The third major theme that emerged from the data involved participants' experiences of gratitude as they related to feeling like they helped students succeed and feeling valued by students, parents, and colleagues for their work. Though possibly distinct at first glance, the

experiences teachers shared about helping students and feeling valued for their work were consistently interwoven throughout the interviews and the focus group. The participants frequently spoke of one and then the other within the same sections of their answers to questions.

Being able to feel like they were part of a student's growth or knowing that they played a role in a student's success was a common refrain from the participants. In relaying his experience with helping his students, Alex stated, "If I feel that they're struggling and then a light bulb goes off, you can see it. I consider that gratitude too, like when I'm helping them to reach a goal." Sarah also shared a "light bulb" story, stating, "When you see that light bulb go on, just like I listened to somebody read today, not the greatest but he could read. He was so proud of himself. That's the kind of the thing I'm grateful for." Sharing those moments with their students and knowing that they played a pivotal role in creating those experiences for their students was a primary source of gratitude for the participating teachers. Being recognized for their role in student success was the next phase of the conversation for many of the teachers.

Throughout the discussions held with participants, the idea of feeling valued for their work or for their contributions to the lives of their students emerged as a frequent thought. Dave, who works with many elementary students throughout the entire school as a reading teacher, shared, "I feel a sense of gratitude when I have the teachers say, 'Hey, you know, this student has really come a long way.'" Maria felt grateful for "just the opportunity to actually have an impact. I have lots of opportunities to do good for kids and adults." Pam summarized her thoughts by stating, "For me, I'm not coming here just to get a paycheck. It's about my life being more meaningful than that. Gratitude is what makes it meaningful to come here, so if I don't have things that I feel gratitude about, then I am just picking up a paycheck and that's not what I

want my life to be.” The notion of their work providing value and meaning in their lives reinforced the role that gratitude plays in their teaching experiences.

Summary

The primary purpose of this study was to develop a deeper understanding of how elementary teachers experience gratitude. The study sought to answer the following research questions: How do elementary teachers experience gratitude in their school settings? How does the experience of gratitude impact teachers’ perceptions of their school? How do teachers describe what supports and what hinders gratitude in schools? And, what practices enable school leaders to facilitate the experience of gratitude in schools? The results indicate that elementary teachers experience gratitude in their school settings through a sense of positivity, through being involved in student success, and in experiences of feeling valued for their work. The data also indicated that a teacher’s perspective on events or the amount of attention paid to daily occurrences with students and colleagues plays a role in the way that teacher experiences gratitude. The participating teachers described a contrast between experiences of gratitude and attitudes of negativity. Furthermore, many teachers in the study explained that their experiences of gratitude came from a choice made by the individual in determining how they framed the events of the school day in terms of positive or negative and in terms of the level of significance they gave to each event. The data suggested that gratitude could play a positive role in building and sustaining a positive school climate through dedicated focus on positive perspectives, recognizing teachers’ roles in student success, and promoting a sense of value in the daily work of teachers.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This qualitative phenomenological study examined the experiences of gratitude of seven elementary school teachers. As a phenomenological study, the research was focused on the lived experiences of the participating teachers in their school environments. Previous gratitude research has indicated positive effects of gratitude interventions for the general population as well as education related groups such as pre-service teachers and students. The positive effects discovered include increases in subjective well-being and life satisfaction, better interpersonal relationships, and increases in pro-social behavior. In the school setting, research has found that developing gratitude can increase adolescents' level of satisfaction with school experience and academic attainment (Wood, Froh, & Geraghty, 2010; Chan, 2011; Morgan, Gulliford, & Carr, 2015).

In order to develop a deeper understanding of the experiences of gratitude for elementary teachers, the seven participants took part in a weeklong gratitude journaling intervention and subsequently participated in individual interviews and a focus group. A constructivist-developmental framework served as the primary lens through which to study teachers' experiences of gratitude. Based on the reviewed literature and in keeping with a constructivist-developmental framework, interview questions were developed to learn more about each participant's individual experiences with gratitude. A culminating focus group then helped to collectively engage the group's experiences and build a shared understanding of the role gratitude plays in schools.

Interpretation of Findings

The interpretation of the findings are connected to the research questions which framed the study and are presented as such. The primary research question was: How do elementary teachers experience gratitude in their school settings? Findings from the data suggest that there are multiple ways in which elementary teachers experience gratitude in their school setting. The modes of experiencing gratitude were similar among all seven participants and acted as the structure for the data analysis in terms of the themes that emerged: Gratitude in Contrast to Negativity, Perspective and Choice, and Making a Difference/Feeling Valued. The findings show that elementary teachers experience gratitude in connection to their work with students. The participants commented that observing growth in their students or hearing positive feedback from colleagues and/or parents about students' growth were strongly connected to their experiences of gratitude. Participants connected these experiences of gratitude with being valued and feeling that their work was meaningful to the lives of others. Participants shared the feeling that their teaching was valued or seeing the effects of their teaching manifested through their students' abilities was motivating and sustained a sense of gratitude over time. Findings from the data also suggest that there is a connection between experiencing gratitude and a teacher's ability to perceive events through a positive lens.

The second research question connected to the concept of perception in asking: How does the experience of gratitude impact teachers' perceptions of their school? Conclusions from the findings indicate that there is a strong connection between how teachers perceive the events in their school and the extent to which they experience gratitude. The data showed that all seven participating teachers felt that paying attention to the good parts of their day helped them to maintain a perspective that mitigated the negative aspects of their work. Experiencing gratitude

was explained as a catalyst for positive thinking that helped the participating teachers avoid being attracted to negative inclinations and negative coworkers. The opposing concepts of positive and negative were plentiful in the data and conclusions indicate that this pair of opposites play a role in how teachers experience gratitude in their schools.

The third research question asked: How do teachers describe what supports and what hinders gratitude in schools? Findings indicated that a teacher's own perception of events can play a role in how the teacher experiences gratitude. This perception is based on the teacher's ability to focus on positive versus negative events and/or positive versus negative interpretations of events. Conclusions from the data suggest that when teachers feel that their work has benefitted students or feel valued for their work by receiving thanks or compliments from families or colleagues, teachers are more likely to experience gratitude. The data also indicated that experiences with negative colleagues hindered teachers' ability to experience gratitude in school. Participants suggested that these negative interactions had the ability to influence perceptions of events so that teachers focused more on the negative aspects of their day than the positive ones. Given that all seven participants correlated gratitude with positivity, encounters that produced a negative view would hinder the experience of gratitude. Findings indicate that taking steps toward promoting positivity and a sense of being valued could prevent the potential attraction to negativity.

The final research question was: What practices enable school leaders to facilitate the experience of gratitude? The data suggested that a concerted effort to focus attention on the positive aspects of the school, including a positive framing of events by school leaders could be beneficial to teachers' experiences of gratitude. Findings indicate that the participating teachers interpreted having a positive outlook on their school day as an effective counterbalance to

negativity. Furthermore, findings indicated that gratitude may act as an effective tool for triaging school events in order to not allow negativity to outweigh the positive occurrences of the day.

Given the findings that teachers experienced gratitude when feeling valued for their work, the data suggest that school leaders find ways to promote the meaningfulness and value of the day to day work of the teachers in their schools. Findings also indicated that participation in a gratitude intervention, such as the gratitude journaling exercise used in the study, could heighten teachers' awareness of opportunities to experience gratitude already present in their work. Data concerning the journaling exercise indicated that teachers became more aware of events and occurrences that facilitated experiences of gratitude during their normal workday in school. In this way, school leaders could help heighten teachers' awareness of gratitude and help promote positive perceptions for teachers.

Implications

The results of this phenomenological study are useful for the individual participating teachers and the school leader of the site school in particular. The results are also meaningful for other teachers and school leaders interested in gratitude and its potential impacts on school climate. Findings from the data provide a way to better understand the lived experiences of gratitude for the seven elementary teachers involved in the study. While the number of participants coupled with the phenomenological nature of the study limit generalizing the results to all schools, the shared nature of the emergent themes discussed in the data analysis suggest that the data provides a beneficial start to learning more about gratitude in school settings.

The site school stands to benefit from this research directly through an increased awareness and deepened mutual understanding of gratitude in the participating teachers. Given the findings that participants felt a connection between experiencing gratitude and positive

perceptions of their work and their school, it stands to reason that these teachers could move forward with a new or renewed ability to contribute to a positive school climate. Participants shared a desire to explore these ideas with colleagues and expressed an interest in gratitude interventions for the faculty and staff as a whole. These practices are in line with the findings of the study and could yield positive implications for the climate of the school. Implications for the school leader follow in terms of building a critical mass of teachers interested in pursuing a positive school climate through gratitude.

The findings from the data of the current study dovetail with recent gratitude literature and have implications for school leaders who seek to create a positive climate. Morgan, Gulliford, & Carr (2015) found the benefits of gratitude include increases in subjective well-being and life satisfaction, better interpersonal relationships, and increases in pro-social behavior. Ting and Yeh (2014) stated, “The results indicate that teachers’ gratitude has a positive impact on trust, satisfaction, and commitment, which, in turn, directly or indirectly, positively influence behavioral/attitudinal loyalty” (p. 97). If school leaders were able to support experiences of gratitude that led to the abovementioned positive effects, it would follow that the climate of the school would change for the better. The implications of an improved climate through use of gratitude practices could benefit teachers’ satisfaction with their work and enhance building-wide relationships among faculty, staff, and leaders.

In a larger context, the study has implications for transformative leaders seeking ways to facilitate change. In considering the potential organizational benefits of an increased satisfaction among teachers, increased positivity in perceptions of self and school, and increased feelings of being valued, gratitude could play a significant role in helping transformative leaders bring about change in their systems. Connecting this potential to recent literature, Reilly (2015) warned,

“People are not inclined to follow along if they feel devalued. Wise leaders see themselves as learning partners” (p. 46). In this respect, it would behoove transformative leaders to educate themselves about gratitude and incorporate this knowledge into the foundational aspects of their school’s practices. Taking the position that school leaders can learn side by side with teachers in constructing meaning around school climate fits the constructivist-developmental framework used in this study. With the underlying assumption that individuals actively create meaning and knowledge from their experiences, school leaders utilizing a constructivist-developmental model could better understand how significant teachers’ experiences of gratitude are for school climate.

Recommendations for Action

In keeping with the findings from the data and in congruence with the reviewed literature, it is recommended that schools leaders actively engage in promoting the value and meaning of teachers’ work on a routine basis and seek methods to heighten teachers’ awareness of gratitude in their school experiences. Findings indicated that teachers’ experiences of gratitude were connected to their perceptions of circumstances and situations. Helping teachers become more aware of the impact of positive perception and of the role gratitude may play in their daily school experience could influence actions and support a positive climate.

Teachers participating in the study uniformly spoke about the significance of feeling valued for their work and about how experiences associated with gratitude were connected with feelings of meaningfulness surrounding their work as teachers in the greater scope of their lives. Given these findings, school leaders consider the importance of value and meaning seriously in their reflections about their schools’ cultures and in their plans for change efforts. In considering meaning and change, Wheatley (2006) argued that “we need to understand that all change results from a change in meaning. We change only if we decide that the change is meaningful to who

we are” (p. 147). Building on this argument, school leaders should promote positive meaning making as situations arise, which could take the form of simple opportunities to express thanks or recognize teacher efforts when they occur.

Data from the study and reviewed literature also support the use of gratitude interventions as a means to increase both awareness of gratitude and the effects of gratitude on individuals’ lives. Given these results, it is recommended that school leaders consider implementing gratitude interventions, such as the three good things exercise used in the study, as deemed fitting for each school’s current climate. Participants in the study indicated that the initial journaling activity helped frame school experiences in a positive way and helped to build awareness of gratitude in their teaching. The reviewed literature stands in agreement with this assessment and finds a host of positive benefits associated with the interventions, including improved feelings about one’s life and increased optimism (Chan, 2011). Given the role perception played in participants’ experiences of gratitude, it would follow that any activity that promotes positivity and optimism should be strongly considered by school leaders.

Recommendations for Further Study

Findings from the data help to explain the lived experiences of gratitude for the seven elementary school teachers that participated in the study. In considering the results, further study is recommended in several areas in order to build upon what has already been learned. Given the relatively small sample size and the collocation of participants in one site, future studies could be conducted in a similar manner but in different locations in order to examine connections and/or differences in data. The study was also exclusively focused on elementary school teachers and did not consider the experiences of gratitude for teachers in middle or high schools. Further

studies could be conducted in these differing grade levels to explore how the age range of students or the content area of teachers might influence teachers' perceptions of gratitude.

In order to better understand the experiences of gratitude in elementary teachers, opportunities for further study exist within the parameters of the current study as well. Findings indicate that perception played a significant role in how the participating elementary teachers experienced gratitude in their school. Given the emergent theme in the data that suggests teachers feel there is a choice to be made regarding positive versus negative perspectives, it is recommended that further studies be conducted on the role of perception in experiences of gratitude. Gathering data about how elementary teachers perceive experiences in their school, and, specifically, about how teachers understand the role of choice regarding their perceptions, would yield beneficial information toward understanding how teachers experience gratitude.

Conclusion

Summarizing gratitude, Wood, Froh, & Geraghty (2010) suggested that "gratitude is part of a wider life orientation towards noticing and appreciating the positive in the world" (p. 891). The elementary teachers who participated in the study describe their experiences of gratitude as positive and fulfilling. Uniform themes, in the form of gratitude as a contrasting experience to negativity, the role of perception and choice regarding teachers' perspectives on their schools, and the significance of feeling valued, presented themselves throughout the data. Findings from the data suggest that school leaders should take active steps to promote the meaningfulness of teachers' work and share with them a sense of being valued and appreciated for their efforts. In addition, the use of gratitude interventions may be employed to heighten awareness of gratitude. Reviewed literature and data from the study suggest that the use of a gratitude intervention, such as the three good things journaling exercise completed by study participants, is an effective

method of increasing awareness of gratitude for teachers. Teachers and school leaders stand to benefit from the data by developing a more thorough understanding of how elementary teachers experience gratitude and how increasing awareness of and opportunities for experiencing gratitude in schools may help foster a positive school climate. Further study in terms of how teachers of other grade levels experience gratitude and more specifically investigating the role of perception in teachers' experiences of gratitude are recommended.

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Appendix A

OUTREACH TO STAKEHOLDERS

Hello,

As some of you may know, I am currently completing my doctorate in educational leadership through the University of New England. I have completed two years' worth of courses and am now working on my dissertation. It is time to begin my data collection and I need your help.

My study is entitled Understanding Experiences of Gratitude in Elementary Teachers: Implications for Leadership. The purpose of the study is to explore how teachers experience gratitude in schools and learn more about what supports or hinders gratitude as well as learn more about how school leaders can facilitate gratitude in schools. I am seeking elementary teachers who have taught at least ten years to take part in my study. The study will consist of three parts: a one week gratitude journaling exercise that should take approximately 15 minutes per day, an interview that should last approximately 45-60 minutes, and a one hour focus group with all study participants.

If you are willing to participate, please let me know and I will schedule a time at your convenience to review and complete the consent form. Once I have confirmed participants, I will set the dates for the week long journaling exercise and schedule dates for the interviews and focus group. Each meeting will be audio recorded.

If you have any questions please reach out to me. Thank you for your consideration.

Joe

Appendix B

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Project Title: *Understanding experiences of gratitude in elementary teachers*

Principal Investigator: *Joseph D. McDonough, Graduate Student, University of New England, jmcdonough@une.edu, 315-854-4173*

Faculty Advisor: *Dr. Joanne Cooper, University of New England, jcooper5@une.edu, 207-221-4960*

Introduction:

- Please read this form, you may also request that the form is read to you. The purpose of this form is to provide you with information about this research study, and if you choose to participate, document your decision.
- You are encouraged to ask any questions that you may have about this study, now, during or after the project is complete. You can take as much time as you need to decide whether or not you want to participate. Your participation is voluntary.

Why is this study being done?

- The purpose of this study is to learn more about how elementary teachers experience gratitude in their school settings. Recent research in gratitude has found a list of positive effects in and outside of schools. This study will focus on learning more about how teachers experience gratitude, what supports and what hinders gratitude, and what school leaders could do to cultivate gratitude.

Who will be in this study?

- You are eligible for this study because of your status as an elementary teacher at the site school who has taught within the school for at least ten years.
- The goal for the study is to have 8-10 participants.

What will I be asked to do?

- You will be asked to take part in a brief gratitude journaling practice known as three good things, which will require you writing about three positive events and

their causes on a daily basis for one week. This journaling exercise should take approximately 15 minutes per day. You will then take part an interview about the gratitude journaling and your experiences with gratitude in your teaching, which will last approximately 45-60 minutes. The researcher of the study will conduct the interviews. Interviews would occur at a mutually acceptable time for the participant and researcher. Finally, all participants will gather for a one hour focus group to build a shared understanding of gratitude. All interviews, including the focus group, will be audio recorded.

What are the possible risks of taking part in this study?

- There are no foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study.
- If you are not comfortable with the study process you may opt out of the study at any time.

What are the possible benefits of taking part in this study?

- There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study.

What will it cost me?

- There will be no cost involved for you to participate in this study.

How will my privacy be protected?

- The researcher will not disclose your identify or your status as a participant to any other participant or others in general. Gratitude journals will not be shared and interviews will be one on one and private. During the focus group, participants will become aware of one another's identity. The primary investigator will review and discuss expectations for privacy for the focus groups and all participants will be asked not to share the identity of participants with others or to repeat the contents of the focus group discussion with others.
- Your name will not be used in the final written findings of the study.

How will my data be kept confidential?

- All data collected during the study will be kept in a locked file cabinet and only viewed by the Principal Investigator. No data will be shared with identifiable information at any time.
- All data will be stored on a computer that is password protected.
- Individually identifiable data will be destroyed after the study is complete
- Please note that regulatory agencies, and the Institutional Review Board may review the research records.

- A copy of your signed consent form will be maintained by the principal investigator for at least 3 years after the project is complete before it is destroyed. The consent forms will be stored in a secure location that only members of the research team will have access to and will not be affiliated with any data obtained during the project.
- Audio recordings of interviews will only be accessible to the principal investigator and will be deleted upon completion of the study.
- Research findings will be shared with all participants upon completion of the study.

What are my rights as a research participant?

- Your participation is voluntary. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your current or future relations with the University or with Canton Central School District.
- You may skip or refuse to answer any question for any reason.
- If you choose not to participate there is no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive. You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time, for any reason. If you choose to withdraw from the research there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.

What other options do I have?

- You may choose not to participate.

Whom may I contact with questions?

- The researchers conducting this study are Joseph McDonough and Dr. Joanne Cooper. For questions or more information concerning this research you may contact them at jmcdonough@une.edu, 315-854-4173 or jcooper5@une.edu, 207-221-4960.
- If you choose to participate in this research study and believe you may have suffered a research related injury, please contact Dr. Joanne Cooper, University of New England, jcooper5@une.edu, 207-221-4960.
- If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may call Olgun Guvench, M.D. Ph.D., Chair of the UNE Institutional Review Board at (207) 221-4171 or irb@une.edu.

Will I receive a copy of this consent form?

- You will be given a copy of this consent form.
-

Participant's Statement

I understand the above description of this research and the risks and benefits associated with my participation as a research subject. I agree to take part in the research and do so voluntarily.

Participant's signature or

Date

Legally authorized representative

Printed name

Researcher's Statement

The participant named above had sufficient time to consider the information, had an opportunity to ask questions, and voluntarily agreed to be in this study.

Researcher's signature

Date

Printed name

Appendix C

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Describe your experience with the three good things journaling exercise.

How would you describe gratitude?

What have you experienced in terms of gratitude as a teacher?

What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the gratitude?

What contexts or situations have supported your experiencing gratitude in school?

What contexts or situations have hindered your experiencing gratitude in school?

How does experiencing gratitude affect your perspective of your teaching?

In what ways could school leaders facilitate experiences of gratitude in schools?

Appendix D

FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

Having all participated in the gratitude journaling exercise and an interview about gratitude, how would you describe your experiences with gratitude to one another?

How would you describe the influence gratitude has or could have on school climate?

What practices could be put in place to facilitate the experience of gratitude in schools?